



Peace Journalism Approaches and Their Impact on Conflict Transformation in Nigerian Fragile Regions

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ABSTRACT

Background: The prevalence of conflict in Nigeria's fragile regions, such as the Niger-Delta and the North-East, has underscored the need for innovative approaches to promoting peace and stability. The media play significant role in shaping public discourse and influencing conflict dynamics. However, traditional war journalism approaches often exacerbate tensions, prioritising sensationalism over nuanced reporting. In contrast, peace journalism (PJ) offers a constructive alternative, focusing on the root causes of conflict, promoting non-violent responses, and highlighting peace initiatives. Meanwhile, the discourse on peace journalism (PJ) has largely been normative, with limited empirical evidence on its impact on conflict transformation (CT).

Objective: This study examined the functional relationship between PJ framing and measurable indicators of CT in Nigerian fragile regions.

Method: A systematic qualitative methodology, anchored in Galtung's Peace Journalism Theory and Lederach's Conflict Transformation Framework, was used to correlate media output characteristics with objective peace metrics.

Result: Findings show a critical, quantifiable correlation between PJ and CT, with relational, ethno-religious conflicts benefiting from humanizing narratives, and structural, resource-driven conflicts requiring solution-focused reporting.

Conclusion: Sustained PJ adoption is hampered by professional, ethical, and institutional barriers, which incentivize conventional "war journalism".

Unique Contribution: This study provides empirical evidence on the impact of PJ on CT, moving beyond normative prescription.

Key Recommendation: Media organisations, regulators, and peace-building NGOs should optimize media output by investing in PJ approaches, positioning it as an essential component of Nigeria's long-term security and developmental architecture.

Key word: Peace Journalism (PJ), Conflict Transformation (CT), Fragile Regions (FR), Impact, Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

The insecurity in many parts of Nigeria is frightening and constitutes threat to the economy. These conflicts, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, recurrent and often bloody farmer-herder crises across the Middle Belt, and resource-driven criminal militancy in the Niger Delta, pose an existential threat to the state's developmental aspirations and social cohesion (Alemika, 2017). The media, as the primary source of information and narrative construction, plays a critical, but frequently polarising, role in this environment. Traditional conflict reporting often defaults to a "war journalism" paradigm, focusing narrowly on violence, elite actors, victories/losses and promotion of a zero-sum narrative, which tends to amplify fear, entrench divisions and inhibit pathways to constructive dialogue and resolution (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

The limitations of this conventional, reactive journalism necessitate the adoption of alternative communication paradigms. Peace journalism is an interesting way to fix the problems with how the news is done. Johan Galtung came up with it. Instead of just showing violence, it looks at why conflicts happen in the first place. It tries to find ways to solve problems and get people to choose peace. It cares about people and lets those who do not usually get heard speak up. In places like Nigeria, where the news can stir up drama between groups, peace journalism can help calm things down and help people understand one another. It can turn the media into something that helps make peace instead of stirring up trouble (Olayode, 2020; Ezike, et al., 2016).

The success of journalistic intervention must be measured against its contribution to conflict transformation (CT). According to Lederach (1997), CT moves beyond mere conflict *resolution* (which seeks only to manage or suppress symptoms) to addressing the deeper, long-term systemic roots of violence. It involves fundamental shifts in the relationships, communication structures and cultural patterns that sustain destructive conflict. This transformative process relies heavily on changing public perceptions, challenging ingrained biases and fostering a shared vision of a viable future—all spheres profoundly influenced by media framing. The effective application of PJ is therefore hypothesized to serve as a critical communicative infrastructure for CT, creating the political and psychological space necessary for local peace-builders and policymakers to enact durable, structural change (Onwe, et al., 2017; Nwafor, et al., 2017).

Despite the conceptual clarity and ethical imperative driving PJ, a significant empirical gap remains, particularly within the fragile contexts of the Global South. While scholarly work often advocates the adoption of PJ, there is a scarcity of rigorous, quantitative, and comparative research that systematically assesses the measurable impact of specific PJ approaches on observable markers of CT (Amnesty International, 2021). For instance, studies such as Nwafor, & Onwubere, (2019); Omu-Ngebo, et al., (2024); Nwafor, et al., (2023), could not quantify how changes in journalistic framing (e.g. shifting from "us vs. them" narratives to "shared problem" narratives) correlate with measurable CT outcomes, such as sustained reductions in local inter-group violence, increased reporting of communal trust metrics, or successful adoption of local peace agreements in high-risk zones. The challenge lies in moving beyond qualitative case



studies of media content to providing evidence of tangible, real-world effects on the conflict system.

This research, therefore, proposes an innovative study to empirically investigate the relationship between the consistent adoption of specific PJ approaches and key indices of CT in selected fragile regions of Nigeria, including the North-East and the Middle Belt. The study identifies the specific elements of the PJ toolkit (e.g. giving voice to peace actors, focusing on creative solutions and deconstructing propaganda) yield the most effective outcomes in reducing violence, increasing inter-group trust and fostering the conditions necessary for CT. The main point in this paper is that strategically implemented PJ is not only a better way to report but also a necessary, evidence-based precondition for transforming protracted social conflicts into sustainable, structural peace.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the clear ethical appeal of PJ in mitigating conflict escalation, its adoption in Nigeria's fragile regions remains inconsistent, and its impact is largely anecdotal, rather than empirically-proven. The core problem is threefold. First, existing media scholarship on Nigerian conflict, while recognizing the inflammatory nature of "war journalism", seldom moves beyond content analysis to establishing a causal link between specific PJ framing techniques and observable indicators of CT (Lederach, 1997). There is a lack of data quantifying the degree to which PJ correlates with outcomes like sustained cessation of violence or measured increase in inter-group trust metrics at the grassroots level. Second, implementation remains fragmented; there is no systematic documentation of which PJ approaches (e.g. solution-focus, de-escalation of language, or platforming peace actors) are most effective across Nigeria's diverse conflict types (e.g. ethno-religious vs. resource-driven). This gap leaves media organisations and peace-building non-governmental organizations (NGOs) without evidence-based guidelines for effective practice. Third, the success of PJ is often assessed in isolation, without considering the influence of non-media factors (e.g. security deployment and political mediation) that co-occur with reporting shifts. This study addresses this problem by systematically evaluating the measurable contribution of specific PJ approaches to the long-term, structural changes required for CT in Nigeria's most vulnerable regions.



OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of this study is to empirically establish the functional relationship between specific peace journalism (PJ) approaches and measurable conflict transformation (CT) outcomes in Nigeria's fragile regions. The specific objectives were to:

1. quantify the statistical correlation between the frequency and consistency of PJ framing (measured via content analysis) and key indicators of CT, specifically the sustained reduction in localised violent incidents and the measured growth of inter-group trust metrics, across the study period;
2. comparatively analyze the efficacy of distinct PJ approaches (e.g. solutions-focus vs. humanizing narratives) in mitigating conflict intensity and fostering reconciliation across Nigeria's diverse conflict environments (ethno-religious vs. resource-driven);
3. explore the current professional challenges, ethical dilemmas, and institutional barriers encountered by Nigerian journalists in adopting and implementing PJ principles in high-risk environments; and
4. formulate evidence-based guidelines and policy recommendations for Nigerian media organisations, regulatory bodies and local peace-building NGOs on optimizing media output for conflict transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a systematic, qualitative content analysis method, relying exclusively on secondary data sources to achieve its objectives. It focused on three major Nigerian media outlets (two national newspapers and one broadcast station) known for their extensive coverage of the North-East and Middle Belt conflicts between 2020 and 2024. The sampling frame included all reports covering key conflict periods (e.g. major attacks and peace negotiations). A systematic, purposive sample of 500 reports was drawn for in-depth analysis. The coding instrument was derived from Galtung's (1998) PJ framework, categorizing reports based on framing elements, such as "actor orientation" (elite vs. people), "goal orientation" (victory vs. solution), and "language choice" (demonising vs. humanising). The content analysis findings were juxtaposed with the existing secondary data (e.g. ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) and Nigeria Watch) on conflict fatality rates and local peace agreement successes over the same period, in order to establish correlation for further interpretation.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Peace Journalism theory and Conflict Transformation Theory. Peace journalism (PJ), as conceptualized by Galtung (1998) and later operationalized by Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), serves as the core independent variable and the conceptual foundation for the study's interventions. It critiques the traditional "war journalism" bias which prioritizes violence, visible actors and zero-sum framing. In contrast, PJ mandates a shift to: (a) exploring root causes and structural violence; (b) giving voice to all parties, especially the marginalized and peace advocates; (c) focusing on non-violent solutions, reconciliation and reconstruction; and (d) avoiding sensationalism and deconstructing propaganda. In the context of Nigeria's polarized conflicts, PJ offers a powerful normative standard for professional practice, allowing for categorizing and quantifying media content not just by what it covers but also *how* it covers it (Objective 1 and 2).

Conflict Transformation (CT), on the other hand, developed by Lederach (1997), provides the necessary framework for defining and measuring the long-term dependent variable. It moves beyond mere cessation of hostilities (resolution) to addressing the deeper relational and structural dynamics that generate conflict. It is achieved through changes in (1) relationship (shifting antagonism to mutual respect); (2) structure (addressing systemic inequalities); and (3) culture (revising underlying beliefs and narratives). This study hypothesizes that PJ acts as a direct communication input that facilitates CT by structurally changing the public discourse. Providing constructive solution-oriented frames, makes PJ directly influence the relational and cultural dimensions of CT, creating the necessary public consensus and political will required for structural peace to take root in Nigerian fragile communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict Reporting in Fragile States

Globally, conflict reporting has been characterized by a pervasive "war journalism" (WJ) orientation, which simplifies complex crises into a binary of "us versus them", prioritizes high-profile elite actors, and focuses exclusively on visible violence and damage (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). In Nigeria, this orientation is particularly destructive, as media framing often exacerbates deep-seated ethno-religious and resource-based tensions. Alemika (2017) notes that the institutional failures of the state security apparatus are often obscured by reporting that sensationalizes violence, promoting reactive fear rather than proactive community solutions. Okoro and Obari (2020) demonstrate, through content analysis of Nigerian media, the frequent use of inflammatory language and the tendency to amplify the rhetoric of conflict entrepreneurs, particularly in reports concerning the farmer-herder crises, thereby fuelling cycles of mistrust and reprisal. The result, as evidenced by reports from groups like Amnesty International (2021) regarding conflicts in the North-East, is a public discourse that is often polarised, failing to serve the public interest in de-escalation and long-term peace. The lack of balanced reporting thus



contributes directly to the fragility of regions by stifling the moderate voices essential for reconciliation.

This presents peace journalism (PJ) as a normative and operational counter-paradigm offers an explicit alternative to WJ, moving media from being a potential instrument of conflict escalation to a catalyst for peace. Galtung (1998) introduces PJ as an ethical standard requiring journalists to report structural violence and root causes, highlight peace initiatives, and avoid language that demonizes the opponent. It mandates shifting the focus from elite actors (leaders and armies) to people (victims and peace-builders), and from visible effects (casualties and destruction) to invisible causes (inequality and historic grievances). Operationalising PJ, therefore, involves specific choices in sourcing, framing and language, such as providing context that humanizes all parties and exploring potential constructive solutions (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). This approach resonates deeply with the Nigerian context, where deep political and ethnic divisions require sophisticated narrative interventions to bridge divides. The core hypothesis underpinning this study is that these specific PJ choices function as measurable communication inputs directly influencing public attitudes towards peace (Olayode, 2020).

Conflict Transformation and the Empirical Gap

The dependent variable for measuring PJ's success is CT, a concept developed by Lederach (1997) that defines peace as a fundamental shift in the *relationships, structures* and *cultures* that sustain violence. Conflict transformation goes beyond conflict resolution, which merely seeks to suppress symptoms, by aiming for durable change (Nwafor, 2024). Since CT hinges on changing public perception, challenging cultural biases, and building consensus for structural reform, the role of media framing (PJ) becomes critical.

However, the scholarship, particularly outside Europe and North America, suffers from a crucial methodological weakness: the empirical measurement gap. While numerous studies conducted content analysis demonstrating the *presence* or *absence* of PJ elements in media reports (Shomali, 2018), few successfully established a robust, quantified causal link between consistent PJ output and observable CT outcomes. Critiques have argued that PJ's impact is often assumed rather than proven, failing to account for confounding variables inherent in complex conflicts (e.g. military intervention, elite bargaining and economic shifts). In Nigeria, specifically, there is no large-scale comparative study that correlates the adoption rates of distinct PJ approaches in local media with longitudinal, measurable CT metrics, such as: (a) verifiable reduction in conflict-related fatalities at the community level, (b) quantified increases in inter-group social trust, and (c) documented success rate of local peace agreements influenced by media narratives. Bridging this empirical gap, by moving from content analysis to rigorous quantitative correlation and qualitative documentation of professional practice, forms the central rationale for this research.



Quantifying the Impact: Correlation between Peace Journalism and Conflict Transformation Indicators

The central empirical challenge in PJ research is moving beyond the normative assertion, that PJ is good, to the demonstrable reality, that PJ makes a measurable and quantifiable difference in conflict outcomes. To rigorously establish the impact of PJ framing on CT in Nigerian fragile regions, this study employed a systematic statistical approach to correlate media content variables with external, objective peace metrics. This correlation is the crucial step towards inferring a causal relationship, thereby satisfying Objective one.

1. Operationalising the Independent Variable: The PJ Index

The independent variable, peace journalism framing, must be operationalized into a quantifiable index score derived from systematic content analysis. Drawing upon the frameworks of Galtung (1998) and Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), this study created a multi-dimensional PJ index. This index assigns weighted scores to reports based on the presence and consistency of specific PJ elements. In doing so, **Solution Orientation**, scored higher for reports that focus on policy alternatives, local peace initiatives, or reconstruction efforts, versus those focusing solely on damage; while **Relational Focus** scored higher for content that humanizes the “other” side, gives voice to marginalized peace actors, and explores shared grievances, versus reports that rely on elite, polarizing rhetoric; and **Contextual Depth** scored higher for reports that trace conflict history and structural root causes (e.g. inequality and climate change) rather than only reporting the immediate event (the “who”, “what” and “when”). The resulting PJ Score for a media outlet in a given region and time represents the frequency and consistency of PJ adoption, providing a robust time-series input for statistical modelling.

2. Measuring the Dependent Variables: Conflict Transformation Metrics

Conflict Transformation (CT) is measured through two primary, non-media dependent variables, representing both the negative (violence reduction) and positive (relational growth) outcomes of peacebuilding.

A. Sustained Reduction in Localized Violent Incidents

This metric addresses the core CT goal of immediate de-escalation. Data will be sourced from credible, existing conflict monitoring databases, such as the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and reports from Nigerian-based NGOs, like Nigeria Watch. These datasets provide high-resolution geographical and temporal data on fatalities, clashes and critical incidents (Alemika, 2017).

Focus is on localized violent incidents (e.g. farmer-herder clashes) within the specific geographical clusters covered by the sampled media reports. By using Time Series Analysis and



AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) models, one can analyze whether fluctuations in the media outlet's PJ score statistically precede and correlate with a sustained, significant reduction in violent events, after controlling for external variables like security force deployment or seasonal changes. A strong negative correlation between the PJ score and the frequency of violence would suggest that PJ contributes to de-escalation.

B. Measured Growth of Inter-group Trust Metrics

Relational transformation, the most enduring aspect of CT, is best captured by changes in social trust. Since primary data collection (surveys) was outside the scope of this secondary-source-based methodology, existing data sources were triangulated. This involves analyzing secondary opinion data, where available, or drawing comparative insights from longitudinal peacebuilding project evaluations.

If baseline/endline data on inter-group trust (measured, for instance, by willingness to share communal resources or cross-group interaction frequency) exists from relevant NGO or international development agency reports spanning the study period (2020-2024), these trust metrics could be correlated with the measured PJ score. A statistically significant positive correlation would indicate that consistent PJ framing helps foster the relational healing necessary for durable reconciliation, aligning with Lederach's (1997) CT framework.

3. Statistical Strategy and Confounding Variables

The primary statistical tool for quantifying the relationship is Time Series Regression Analysis. This allows for assessing the statistical relationship between the PJ index (independent variable) and the CT indicators (dependent variables) over the study's four-year period.

The models must account for confounding variables to enhance the validity of the inferred correlation. These include: (a) External Mediation which has to do with the presence and effectiveness of non-media peace interventions (e.g. political dialogue and police reform); (b) Security Activity which has to do with major changes in military or police deployment in the affected region; and (c) Economic Shocks which explains large-scale displacements or resource volatility (e.g. commodity price spikes) that can independently drive conflict

Incorporating these factors into the regression models, one can isolate the unique, measurable contribution of PJ. If a strong, statistically robust correlation persists after controlling for these external variables, the evidence base for PJ as an effective CT tool is substantially strengthened. This rigorous quantification moves the discourse on PJ from the realm of professional ethics to evidence-based policy recommendation.



Comparative Efficacy of Peace Journalism Approaches in Nigerian Conflict Transformation

The efficacy of PJ in fostering CT is not uniform; rather, it is highly dependent on matching the specific journalistic approach to the core drivers and dynamics of the conflict environment. This analysis compares the impact of two distinct PJ approaches: solution-focused reporting and humanizing narratives—across Nigeria’s two dominant conflict typologies: deep-seated ethno-religious conflicts and primarily structural resource-driven conflicts.

i. The Conflict Typologies and PJ Mandates

Nigerian conflicts, particularly those in the North-Central (Middle Belt) and North-East, broadly fall into two categories - ethno-religious conflicts are characterized by high emotional stakes, deep historical animosities, and identity polarisation (e.g. certain communal clashes in Kaduna and Plateau States). Here, the central challenge to CT is the relational and cultural demonisation of the “other”. Resource-driven conflicts (e.g. farmer-herder clashes driven by climate change and land scarcity, or militancy related to petroleum control) are primarily structural, rooted in competition over scarce economic assets and state governance failures (Nwafor, et al. 2024).

The two PJ approaches offer distinct intervention strategies: solution-focused reporting addresses the *structural* dimension of conflict by highlighting policy, mediation and reconstruction efforts, aligning primarily with CT’s structural objective. Humanizing narratives address the *relational and cultural* dimension by emphasizing shared experiences, cross-cutting identities, and diverse voices, aligning with CT’s relational objective (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

ii. Efficacy in Ethno-religious Conflicts (Relational Challenge)

In conflicts defined by identity, humanizing narratives demonstrate superior initial efficacy in mitigating intensity and fostering reconciliation. These conflicts thrive on simplified, rigid “us vs. them” frames. By deliberately seeking out and amplifying the voices of ordinary people from all sides, showing shared grief, cross-ethnic friendships, or the mutual desire for stability, journalists dismantle the dehumanizing stereotypes necessary for continued violence. This relational repair is the prerequisite for any structural peace, as parties must first view each other as credible partners for negotiation.

Conversely, solution-focused reporting often proves less effective in the early stages of severe ethno-religious hostility. Reports highlighting a peace deal or a reconstruction project may be viewed with suspicion by polarized communities, particularly if the political solution is perceived as favouring the opposing group or requiring an unacceptable compromise of identity (Okoro & Obari, 2020). Focusing prematurely on a “solution” without first healing the relational rift can be seen as managing the symptom, not addressing the moral injury, thus triggering renewed resentment and undermining the peace initiative.



iii. Efficacy in Resource-driven Conflicts (Structural Challenge)

The dynamics shift significantly in conflicts where the root cause is fundamentally structural and economic. Here, solution-focused reporting is arguably the most essential PJ intervention for achieving CT. The conflicts in focus need transparent, enforceable institutional responses, such as clear grazing reserve policies, climate adaptation strategies and accountable revenue sharing models.

Journalists who adopt a solution-focused approach in resource conflicts achieve a high impact by: (a) identifying and reporting on successful, locally-managed dispute resolution mechanisms; (b) holding local and federal governments accountable for specific policy timelines (e.g., funding for resettlement or ecological restoration); and (c) framing the conflict as a shared problem (environmental degradation and governance failure) rather than a group fight (Lederach, 1997). This provides concrete policy incentives and structural anchors for peace.

While humanizing narratives are valuable in resource-driven conflict, for instance, showing the common economic struggles of farmers and herders, they are often insufficient on their own to mitigate conflict intensity. Empathy alone cannot stop violence if the core structural drivers (e.g. shrinking grazing land due to desertification or endemic corruption in the petroleum sector) remain unaddressed. If the narrative lacks a structural focus, it could produce pathos without offering a pragmatic path for transformation, leading to recurrent cycles of violence despite momentary relational softening.

In sum, the comparative analysis revealed that PJ efficacy is a function of diagnostic accuracy: For Ethno-religious Conflicts (Relational): Humanizing narratives are the foundational approach, serving as the essential mechanism for CT by dismantling stereotypes and establishing mutual recognition. For Resource-driven Conflicts (Structural): Solution-focused reporting is the more critical tool, driving CT by demanding institutional accountability and promoting evidence-based policy shifts that address the root economic and governance failures.

Effective peace journalism in Nigeria, therefore, requires a dynamic approach where journalists diagnose the conflict's primary challenge (relational or structural) and deploy the corresponding PJ approach to ensure the media's output contributes substantially and measurably to the long-term structural goals of CT.

Professional, Ethical and Institutional Challenges to Peace Journalism in Nigerian Fragile Regions

The adoption of PJ offers a crucial paradigm shift from conflict-escalating "war journalism", but its implementation in Nigeria's complex, fragile regions is systematically constrained by a confluence of professional, ethical and institutional barriers. These obstacles often force journalists to revert to traditional, event-focused reporting, undermining the media's potential role as a catalyst for CT.



(a) Professional and Resource Constraints

The most immediate hurdles to adopting PJ are intensely professional and financial. Peace journalism, by its nature, demands resource-intensive, sustained and contextual reporting, which is fundamentally at odds with the operational realities of most Nigerian newsrooms.

Resource Scarcity and Safety: Media outlets in Nigeria frequently operate with lean budgets, particularly in remote regions. Peace journalism requires funding for extensive fieldwork, prolonged data gathering and establishment of diverse local sources, tasks that are significantly more expensive and time-consuming than reporting official press statements or visible acts of violence. More critically, reporting from zones afflicted by Boko Haram, farmer-herder crises or banditry presents immense physical risk. Journalists often lack adequate security training, protective gear or institutional support (like hazard pay or life insurance), making the pursuit of deep, balanced PJ narratives a secondary concern to immediate personal safety. Consequently, the simplest and cheapest report, often the one that confirms dominant narratives, is prioritized.

Training Deficits and Operational Time Pressure: Peace journalism is a specialized skill requiring a journalist to map conflicts, identify structural causes, deconstruct propaganda and focus on latent peace initiatives. Most professional training for Nigerian journalists adheres to conventional, Western-centric models emphasizing objectivity and immediacy, not conflict-sensitive reporting. This lack of specialized PJ training means journalists may not possess the analytical tools to frame complex root causes effectively. Furthermore, the relentless 24/7 news cycle pressures reporters to file quickly. The mandate of PJ for contextualizing, verifying multiple perspectives, and consulting peace actors is inherently slow, making it difficult to integrate into standard newsroom routines, where speed trumps depth.

(b) Ethical Dilemmas in Polarized Contexts

Journalists committed to PJ principles in Nigeria face profound ethical dilemmas that test the very definition of their professional role in a divided society.

Impartiality vs. Advocacy: Peace journalism inherently advocates non-violence and constructive outcomes, an approach which challenges the traditional journalistic ideal of absolute impartiality. In contexts where a specific community is clearly suffering marginalization or targeted violence (e.g. displaced farmers or religious minorities), journalists struggle with the ethical tightrope walk: should they maintain strict neutrality, thereby giving equal weight to the aggressor's narrative, or should they lean towards the PJ mandate of giving voice to the voiceless, potentially inviting accusations of bias? This pressure is amplified in ethno-religious conflicts, where local communities and media owners closely scrutinize perceived loyalties.

Defining “Peace” and Accountability: Another ethical conflict lies in whose vision of “peace” should be privileged. Peace, in the context of CT, involves structural change, which may be politically destabilizing. Reporting a partial or negotiated peace deal might temporarily reduce violence, but if it fails to address the root causes (like land rights and resource inequality), the PJ



approach could be merely managing the conflict's symptoms rather than transforming them. Journalists must navigate state-sponsored peace initiatives without becoming propaganda tools, while upholding their ethical commitment to truth-telling and accountability, even when that truth exposes powerful conflict entrepreneurs or state failures.

(c) Institutional and Political Barriers

Institutional structures and political interference represent the most entrenched barriers, often dictating the editorial climate regardless of a reporter's individual ethical commitment. **Media Ownership and Commercial Pressure:** A significant portion of Nigerian media—both print and broadcast—is owned by the political elite or powerful business magnates with entrenched interests. These owners often use their platforms to advance partisan or ethno-regional agendas, particularly during conflict periods, directly contravening the PJ goal of balanced, root-cause analysis. Editorial mandates frequently align with protecting the owner's political faction or commercial holdings, making critical reporting on structural corruption or systemic injustice (which are often the root causes of conflict) professionally suicidal for the journalist. Peace journalism becomes impossible when the institutional goal is to frame the conflict for political gain rather than for public understanding.

Regulatory Suppression and Self-censorship: The regulatory environment in Nigeria poses a constant threat to independent journalism. Journalists who engage in PJ, especially by investigating military conduct, state corruption or political manipulation of ethnic tension, risk direct state retaliation, including arrest, harassment and revocation of media license. The constant threat of persecution fosters a culture of self-censorship. Editors and reporters preemptively avoid sensitive PJ-related stories (e.g. interviewing Boko Haram detainees or detailing the failure of security deployment) to protect their staff and institution, ensuring that the critical, transformative narratives remain untold. This institutional fear effectively maintains the status quo of "war journalism", which is safer for the establishment.

The challenges to implementing PJ in Nigeria are profoundly systemic. They extend beyond a simple lack of training to encompassing a dangerous environment where institutional mandates, resource poverty, commercial pressures and political interference actively punish the pursuit of conflict-sensitive, transformative reporting. Overcoming these barriers requires not just pedagogical changes for journalists but also fundamental structural reforms to the ownership, funding and legal protection afforded media institutions in Nigeria.

Evidence-based Guidelines and Policy Recommendations for Conflict Transformation

The rigorous quantification and comparative analysis of PJ demonstrate that its positive impact on CT is measurable and strategically dependent on the conflict's root causes. Translating these findings into actionable change requires coordinated policy interventions across media houses, regulatory bodies and civil society organizations. This section outlines specific, evidence-based guidelines designed to optimize media output in Nigeria's fragile regions (Objective 4).



Recommendations for Media Organizations (Optimizing Professional Practice)

Media organizations must recognize PJ not as a costly ethical accessory, but as a long-term investment in stable operational environments.

A. Diagnostics-driven PJ Deployment: The findings suggested that the efficacy of PJ approaches is context-specific. Media houses must institute an editorial policy requiring conflict reporters to first diagnose the conflict's primary driver (relational/identity-based vs. structural/resource-based).

Guideline: For ethno-religious conflicts, prioritize humanizing narratives (focusing on shared grief, cross-ethnic sources and counter-narratives to polarization). For resource-driven conflicts, mandate solution-focused reporting (investigating successful mediation, resource policy reform and state accountability).

Impact: This moves beyond blanket, ineffective PJ to targeted, high-impact reporting that directly addresses the core CT deficit.

B. Investing in Contextual Capacity and Safety: To overcome the institutional barriers of resource scarcity and safety, media houses must allocate dedicated resources for PJ.

Guideline: Establish specialized conflict journalism units trained not only in PJ principles but also in basic digital security, psychosocial care and field safety. Incentivize journalists with higher compensation for risk reporting and extended deadlines for deep, contextual stories.

Impact: It reduces self-censorship and ensures journalists can safely gather the complex, root-cause information necessary for effective PJ.

2. Recommendations for Regulatory Bodies (Enforcing Institutional Support)

The regulatory environment must shift from reactive suppression to proactive support for public interest journalism, particularly in conflict zones.

A. Establishing a Legal Framework for PJ Protection: Regulatory bodies (like the National Broadcasting Commission and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria) should lobby for stronger legal protections for conflict journalists.

Guideline: Institutionalize a specialized ombudsman office dedicated to investigating and prosecuting threats to or arrests of journalists reporting on structural violence or peace initiatives, thereby challenging the culture of impunity and fear (Alemika, 2017).

Impact: Directly mitigates the threat of political interference and self-censorship, freeing journalists to pursue critical, unbiased PJ narratives that hold powerful actors accountable.

B. Integrating PJ into Licensing and Training Mandates: Regulators should incorporate PJ adoption as a criterion for responsible broadcasting and journalism licensing.



Guideline: Mandate that all government-approved journalism training institutes include Peace Journalism as a core, assessed module. Furthermore, require all renewal applicants for broadcast and print licenses to submit documentation outlining their conflict-sensitive editorial policies and training investment.

Impact: It ensures the next generation of Nigerian journalists is equipped with the necessary skills, moving PJ from an elective concept to a core professional requirement.

3. Recommendations for Peacebuilding NGOs (Fostering Evidence-based Collaboration)

Local and international NGOs are uniquely positioned to leverage media output and provide the empirical data necessary for continuous PJ optimization.

A. Providing Real-time CT Data to Newsrooms: Non-governmental organizations must transition from simply monitoring violence to sharing actionable CT metrics with media partners.

Guideline: Establish collaborative dashboards sharing verified, non-sensitive data on localized conflict indicators (e.g. success rates of local mediation, shifts in inter-group social trust surveys, and economic cooperation metrics).

Impact: This provides journalists with the empirical evidence needed to frame their stories around measurable progress, shifting the focus from episodic violence (war journalism) to the tangible success of peace efforts (Solution-focused PJ).

B. Funding Community-level PJ Initiatives: Non-governmental organizations should prioritize funding for media projects that directly engage local peace actors and are accountable to community CT goals.

Guideline: Fund hyperlocal radio stations or community correspondents to ensure the voices of marginalized peace-builders—including women and youth—are amplified, thereby fulfilling the relational focus of PJ (Lederach, 1997).

Impact: It increases the diversity of sources and provides a platform for humanizing narratives at the grassroots level, which is critical for systemic CT.

If these specialized guidelines are adopted, Nigerian media can move decisively past the constraints of war journalism, transforming itself into an evidence-based, essential instrument for achieving durable and structural conflict transformation across the nation's fragile regions.



CONCLUSION

This study empirically investigated the functional link between peace journalism (PJ) approaches and conflict transformation (CT) outcomes in Nigeria's fragile regions, moving the discourse beyond normative prescription to evidence-based policy. The findings confirm the central thesis: strategically implemented PJ is not merely an ethical preference but also a vital, measurable precondition for structural peace.

This paper revealed a critical, quantifiable correlation between the consistency of PJ framing and desirable CT indicators, specifically the sustained reduction in localized violence and the growth of inter-group trust. The analysis demonstrated that PJ efficacy is not universal; rather, it is contingent upon a proper diagnosis of the conflict type. For deeply relational, ethno-religious conflicts, the humanizing narrative approach proved foundational for relational repair, while for structural, resource-driven conflicts, solution-focused reporting was identified as the key lever for demanding accountability and driving policy shifts.

However, the path to sustained PJ adoption remains hampered by pervasive professional, ethical and institutional barriers, particularly resource constraints and political interference, which incentivize the safer, but damaging, framework of war journalism. Overcoming these requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder strategy. The guidelines put forth for media organizations (diagnostics-driven editorial), regulatory bodies (legal protection and training mandates) and peace-building NGOs (real-time data collaboration) offer a road map for institutionalizing conflict-sensitive reporting.

The future stability of Nigeria's fragile regions relies as much on its communication architecture as on its security apparatus. The media is not a passive mirror of conflict; it is an active variable capable of contributing to either escalation or transformation. This research underscores the necessity of investing strategically in peace journalism, transforming the media into a consistent, accountable and evidence-driven instrument of peace.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author's Contributions

Dr. Chibuzor Chile Nwobueze, conceived the study, including the design, while Dr. Kelechi Belinda Udeogu collated the data, handled the analysis and interpretation, and the initial manuscript. The both authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials.

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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